

## **900 NUMBERS**

Pitches for you to use a 900 number are everywhere. From your telephone, you can vote in a poll, consult a psychic, talk to a willing stranger, and do much, much more. 900 numbers are called "pay-per-call" services, because you pay for the call as well as the cost of the information or service provided during the call.

Legitimate telephone and 900 number companies follow the rules, but watch out for fraudulent operators who may try to take advantage of you by:

- not clearly stating the cost of calls;
- misrepresenting their goods or services;
- luring children into making expensive calls;
- using phony prize offers; and
- charging for calling toll-free numbers.

A common practice by companies offering sweepstakes or premium incentive offers is to request the consumer call a 900 number to claim a prize. These companies make their money from the fee charged for the 900 number. The fees range from \$3.00 to \$50.00 per call and are included on your telephone bill. The prizes are usually worth less than the cost of the phone call.

When you dial a 900 number that will cost a total of more than \$2, you should hear:

- the 900 number company's name;
- the cost of the call;
- a description of the information, goods or services to be provided;
- notice that you can hang up within 3 seconds of hearing a certain tone or signal and not be charged for the call; and
- a warning that youth under 18 need their parents' permission to stay on the line.

Some companies have promoted 900 numbers to children, encouraging them to pick up the phone to talk to a cartoon character. Under Federal Trade Commission rules, companies cannot advertise or direct pay-per-call services to children under 12 unless they are educational services dedicated to areas of school study. If the ad is directed to consumers under the age of 18, it must state that parental permission is required to make the call.

U.S. West Communications offers a 900 number call blocking service. This service is offered free of charge and will prevent any 900 or 976 phone calls from being dialed from your home phone. To obtain the 900 blocking service on your home phone, contact the U.S. West business office; the number is located in the front of your telephone directory. If you are not a U.S. West customer, contact your local and long distance providers to determine if 900 number blocking is available.